

## **Towards an Ethical and Trustworthy Social Commerce Community for Brand Value Co-creation: A trust-commitment perspective**

### **Abstract**

Firms have been increasingly using social commerce platforms to engage with customers and support their brand value co-creation. While social commerce is now bringing a variety of benefits to business, it has also challenged marketing ethics surrounding online consumer privacy. Drawing on the trust-commitment theory, we develop a model that aims to create an ethical and trustworthy social commerce community for brand value co-creation by examining the impacts of online consumer privacy concerns (namely privacy risk and privacy control) and social interaction constructs (namely consumer-peer interaction and collaborative norms) on consumers' psychological reactions. Using an empirical study, we find that: (1) privacy risk, privacy control, and collaborative norms significantly influence consumers' trust; 2) consumer-peer interaction and collaborative norms are positively related to relationship commitment; and 3) relationship commitment and trust positively affect consumers' brand value co-creation in the context of social commerce. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** social commerce, brand value co-creation, privacy, trust-commitment theory, consumer-peer interaction, collaborative norms

## **Introduction**

Social commerce refers to “any commercial activities facilitated by or conducted through the broad social media and Web 2.0 tools in consumers’ online shopping process or business’ interactions with their customers” (Lin, Li, & Wang, 2017, p. 191). Many firms are now using social commerce platforms to interact with their customers and to promote their products and services. For example, by May 2018, the number of Facebook brand pages had reached 80 million, and more than 41% of U.S. small businesses were using Facebook (Smith, 2018). Among these Facebook brand pages, Samsung has the largest audience, with more than 49 million fans.<sup>1</sup> As such, social commerce has become an important venue for firms to engage with their customers. Practitioners have been increasingly interested in how to support consumers’ value co-creation in social commerce because of its popularity and practical importance.

Indeed, customers have been increasingly relying on social commerce to exchange product information and shopping experiences for supporting each other’s purchase decisions. For example, more than 1 billion consumers visit Facebook brand pages regularly (Smith, 2018). On social commerce platforms such as Facebook brand pages, customers can interact with companies and others and share their feedbacks and shopping experiences, which can then be recorded and analyzed for extracting business value. Brand value can thus be co-created through consumers’ interactions on social commerce platforms (Tajvidi, Wang, Hajli, & Love, 2017). In other words, customers tend to participate in the co-creation process through their interactions on social

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.socialbakers.com/statistics/facebook/pages/total/brands>, accessed In Feb. 2019.

commerce platforms. While recent studies have begun to examine how various factors can enhance brand value co-creation (Merz, Zarantonello, & Grappi, 2018; Shamim, Ghazali, & Albinsson, 2016; Tajvidi et al., 2017), there still remains a paucity of empirical understanding about motivational factors that affect consumers' psychological attitudes and intentions towards brand value co-creation, particularly, in the context of social commerce (Tajvidi, Richard, Wang, & Hajli, 2018). Therefore, the first objective of this work is to *examine* how consumers' social interactions support their brand value co-creation in social commerce. As indicated by preceding discussions, social interactions among consumers on social media are vital during brand value co-creation. Therefore, we are especially interested in how social interactions can facilitate brand value co-creation in social commerce via investigating the effect of consumer-peer interaction and collaborative norms (please refer to "Brand Value Co-creation in Social Commerce" for an explanation).

Further, experiences of social commerce may not always be so positive, and social media platforms have challenged traditional concepts about privacy and ethical conduct. Take the Facebook privacy scandal as an example (M. Anderson, 2018). Cambridge Analytica (a London-based data-mining firm) lifted tens of millions of Facebook profiles without users' permission and accessed data from as many as 87 million users. Social media platforms are also raising ethical issues in this regard. As consumers post product information and share their shopping experiences on social commerce platforms, the information becomes accessible to companies and platform providers. In such a scenario, the information may be misused (e.g., used by platform providers

without consumers' authorization), and consumers may feel concerned about their privacy. Brand value co-creation has thus become the main activity that causes ethical debates about the privacy of information on social commerce platforms (e.g., Ashworth & Free, 2006). However, the previous literature has mainly focused on non-contrary factors (e.g., social support, relationship quality) (Tajvidi et al., 2017) as predictors of brand value co-creation, and few studies have examined how contrary factors such as privacy influence consumers' brand value co-creation. Therefore, our second research objective is to *examine the influences of privacy on consumers' brand value co-creation in social commerce*. In particular, our study focuses on examining the effect of privacy risk and privacy control (please refer to "Ethical Issues Related to Brand Co-creation: Privacy in Social Commerce" for an explanation).

To accomplish our research objectives, the trust-commitment theory (TCT) was chosen as the theoretical lens of our study. It posits that relationship commitment and trust can play important roles in driving consumer behaviors (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). As such, it can offer a mechanism to explain how to build a trustworthy social commerce community motivating consumers to participate in brand value co-creation. Following TCT, brand value co-creation can be viewed as a cooperation process in social commerce at the core of social interaction (e.g., Liang, Ho, Li, & Turban, 2011). To achieve our first research objective, we integrate consumers' social interactions (i.e., consumer-peer interaction and collaborative norms) into TCT to further understand how to support the brand value co-creation (refer to "Brand Value Co-creation in Social Commerce" for more details). To achieve our second research objective, we integrate

privacy into TCT and investigate how privacy can affect their psychological attitudes (namely, relationship commitment and trust), which in turn lead to brand value co-creation. Here an enhanced understanding about consumers' privacy is critical in building a trustworthy environment because privacy can be violated when people interact with each other on social media (Liu & Wang, 2018; Liu, Wang, Min, & Li, 2019).

Overall, our work aims to provide a psychologically informed understanding of ethical and trustworthy environments for branding co-creation through researching how consumers react to privacy concerns and collaborate with each other in social commerce. Our study makes two key contributions to marketing ethics. First, by applying TCT, our study provides valuable insights into how to support consumers' brand value co-creation in social commerce. Specifically, our work provides further insights into how social interactions (i.e., consumer-peer interaction and collaborative norms) can help facilitate a trustworthy environment that boosts their brand value co-creation in social commerce. Second, by integrating privacy into the TCT framework, our study can provide an enhanced understanding of the way consumers react to the privacy issue on social commerce platforms, which will help to create a more informed ethical and trustworthy environment for engaging customers in the brand value co-creation process. We thus enrich the literature by examining the impacts of contrary factors on brand value co-creation. In other words, our study focuses on the role of social interactions and privacy, which deal with the positive and negative aspect of social commerce, respectively. From the practical perspective, our results can help

consumers better protect their privacy while participating in social commerce platforms and also inform ethical practitioners' guidelines for protecting consumers' privacy and supporting consumers' brand value co-creation.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: we first review the previous literature and discuss our theoretical foundations, based upon which we develop our hypotheses. We then describe our method and present our data analysis results. Finally, we discuss the implications for theory and practice and the limitations of our study.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation**

In this section, we first discuss the concept of brand value co-creation and identify gaps in the literature. We then describe ethical issues surrounding consumer privacy concerns in social commerce and introduce our theoretical foundation: TCT.

#### **Brand Value Co-creation in Social Commerce**

Marketing brand value co-creation is one key value that social commerce creates, and companies has begun to leverage social commerce into their marketing strategies to achieve such a marketing value through engaging their customers on social commerce platforms (Zhou, Zhang, Zimmermann, & applications, 2013). In social commerce, consumers co-create brand value by interacting with other consumers, and their role shifts from passive audiences to active partners (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Brand value co-creation consists of an interaction perspective that argues that brand value, rather than solely being added during a separated production and consumption process, can be co-created in the social context of the simultaneous production and consumption process (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011). In such a scenario,

consumers contribute to firms' competitive advantage, and firms need to support consumers' brand value co-creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The literature has thus proposed the service-dominant logic, which argues that brand value co-creation is enhanced when consumers' interactions are supported (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue that co-creation has four building blocks: dialogue, access, transparency, and risk. Dialogue indicates that co-creation involves interaction and deep engagement on both sides (company and consumer). On social commerce platforms such as Facebook brand pages, consumers interact with others as well as companies to post product comments and shopping experiences. Consumers are thus able to make decisions that are more informed. Access indicates that companies can no longer hide their prices, costs, etc., and transparency reflects the straightforward disclosure of product and company information. By browsing posts from others on social commerce platforms, consumers can learn more about the prices and attributes of products. Last, risk reflects possible negative outcomes for consumers<sup>2</sup>. By better interacting with consumers and meeting their needs, companies can lower the risk of brand damage. Therefore, in social commerce, social interactions among consumers are the locus of brand value co-creation, and co-creation experiences are the basis of value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

The previous literature has examined various factors influencing brand value co-creation. Some studies have focused on social factors. For example, See-To and Ho

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<sup>2</sup> Firms could also engage in deceptive practices on social commerce platforms to manipulate consumers' perceptions and influence the process of brand value co-creation. We thank one reviewer for pointing this issue out.

(2014) propose that electronic word of mouth and trust beliefs enhance value co-creation on social media. Shamim et al. (2016) state that subjective norms are positively related to both value co-creation attitude and behavior. Tajvidi et al. (2017) argue that social support and relationship quality positively influence intention to co-create brand value. Other studies have focused on consumers' characteristics. For example, Merz et al. (2018) state that consumers' motivation and resources lead to value co-creation. Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, and Du (2015) examine value co-creation from the firm's perspective and find that innovation, marketing, and networking capability enhance consumers' value co-creation in the context of product development.

While the recent literature has made important process, there remains two important limitations. First, few empirical studies have examined how to support brand value co-creation in the context of social commerce. Second, few studies have examined the role of contrary factors such as privacy on brand value creation. To support brand value co-creation, firms strive to facilitate a trustworthy environment that can encourage consumers' co-creation behaviors in social commerce. On social commerce platforms where consumers do not have face-to-face interactions, trust can let consumers behave more proactively (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005). Therefore, it is essential to understand how consumers develop trust in social commerce (Liang et al., 2011; Lu, Zhao, Wang, & Applications, 2010; Shi, Chow, & Systems, 2015). Social commerce changes consumer behaviors at its core of people interaction and collaboration (e.g., Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), both of which can play a significant role in developing consumer trust and relationship



commitment that can lead to sustainable brand value co-creation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In social commerce, consumers' evaluation of a trustworthy environment can be determined by their engagement experience within the community (Bhuian, 2016; Chen & Shen, 2015). As such, as two primary features of social commerce, people interaction and collaboration are likely to be associated with the evaluation of a trustworthy social commerce community. Therefore, we attempt to provide further insights into how to support brand value co-creation through studying the role of consumer-peer interaction and collaboration norms in creating a trustworthy social commerce community. The two terms will be discussed in detail in their respective hypotheses.

Further, recent literature has started to realize the importance of privacy in brand value co-creation (Tajvidi et al., 2018), consistent with the social media literature in general (Liu & Wang, 2018). Specifically, as consumers engage in brand value co-creation, they interact with firms and other consumers and post product-related information (e.g., their shopping experiences, their comments on products/services) on social commerce platforms. Once the information is posted on these platforms, it is out of consumers' control, and the information can be misused. Such a scenario raises ethical issues such as "Who owns the information shared on social commerce platforms?" "How should the shared information be used?" In other words, information generated during brand value co-creation on social media may be accessed by firms and/or platform providers without consumer' authorization. Consumers may feel concerned about their privacy as they engage in brand value co-creation. As such, understanding the role of privacy in the process of brand value co-creation is important

to inform firms about how to facilitate an ethical social commerce environment and thus support brand value co-creation. In the worst scenario, consumers may not engage in brand value co-creation to protect their privacy. Then the questions about privacy (e.g., “Who owns the information shared on social commerce platforms?”) become irrelevant since the process of brand value co-creation has ceased and no information will be generated any more. Therefore, brand value-co-creation has challenged marketing ethics surrounding privacy in social commerce. In this work, we attempt to empirically test the influence of privacy on brand value co-creation, and thus providing some further insights into how we can facilitate an ethical social commerce environment encouraging consumers’ engagement in this process. In the next section, we discuss ethical issues related to privacy in social commerce in more detail.

### **Ethical Issues Related to Brand Co-creation: Privacy in Social Commerce**

In off-line environments, consumers usually do not feel concerned about their privacy because of two main reasons (Caudill & Murphy, 2000). First, consumers’ identity is anonymous, and their shopping behaviors are collected in the aggregate. Second, when personal information is collected (e.g., membership card number, credit card number), consumers give up some of their privacy in return for certain value (e.g., discounts, coupons).

However, these privacy and ethical paradigms are challenged on social commerce platforms. First, consumers can no longer maintain their anonymity on such platforms. For example, on Facebook brand pages, consumers’ identities are likely to be accessed by firms and platform providers. Further, the exchange of value between social

commerce platforms and consumers becomes less obvious. Consumers often do not receive any direct benefits from posting information on social commerce platforms.

According to Foxman and Kilcoyne (1993), consumers' perception of privacy violation depends on two factors: knowledge and control. The first factor refers to consumers' knowledge of the collection and use of their information. Once information is posted on social commerce platforms, it can be accessed by others and become co-owned (Petronio, 2012). Firms and platform providers can thus collect consumer information from social commerce platforms. Their justification for this is mainly based on a utilitarian perspective: collecting and using this information can help them provide better products/services to consumers as a whole (Caudill & Murphy, 2000). However, consumers may have limited knowledge when their information is collected. In other words, firms or platform providers may collect consumers' information in a way that consumers can neither avoid nor detect (Ashworth & Free, 2006). Consumers also do not know what value is derived for them when firms collect this information. This scenario leads to an important ethical issue: firms obtain consumers' information for their own good, but consumers are not provided with equivalent value (Caudill & Murphy, 2000). In such a scenario, consumers can perceive that there is a possibility of losses associated with posting information on social commerce platforms (i.e., privacy risk) (Xu, Dinev, Smith, & Hart, 2011) as they may not receive any compensation. When the possibility of losses is higher (i.e., higher privacy risk), consumers are more likely to perceive that their privacy is violated.

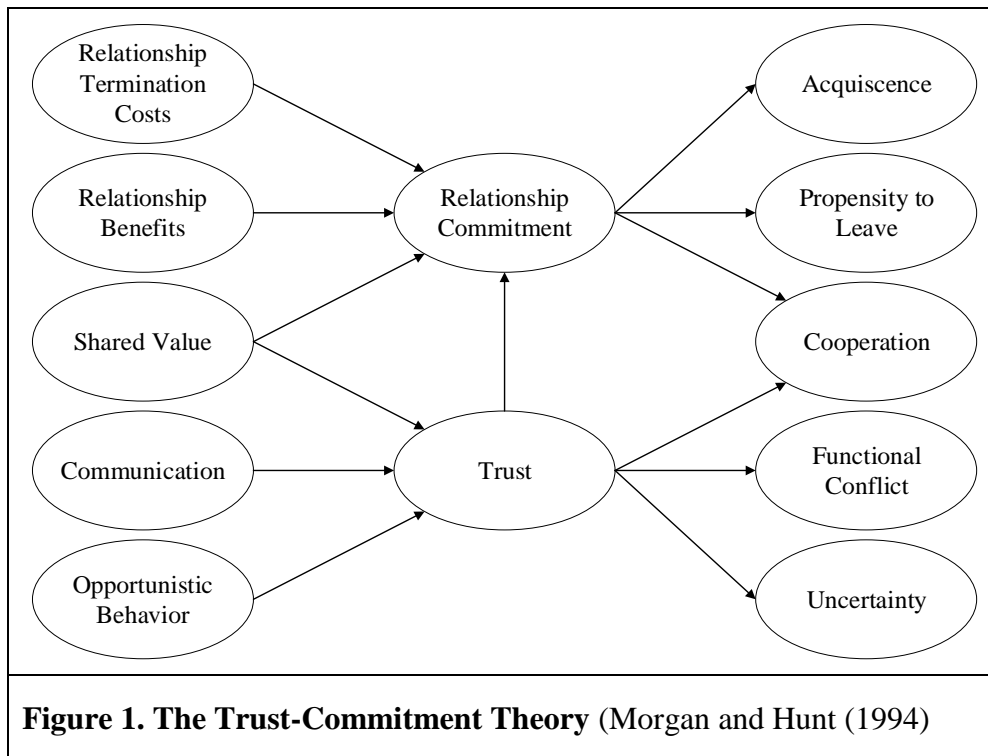
The second factor deals with consumers' control of their information. On social

commerce platforms, consumers may still perceive themselves to have the ownership and the fundamental right to their posted information (Turow, 2003). However, it is not always possible for consumers to monitor how the collected information is used. This scenario leads to another important ethical issue: firms and platforms can easily collect information for one purpose (e.g., collect shopping experiences to improve products) but then use it for other purposes (e.g., sell the information to third parties). As a result, consumers may desire to manage the release and dissemination of posted information on social commerce platforms (i.e., privacy control) (Xu et al., 2011) so that they can retain control over the information even after it is posted (Metzger, 2007). When consumers feel that they do not have enough control over their posted information, they probably perceive that their privacy is violated.

To summarize, privacy risk and privacy control influence consumers' perception of privacy violation (Foxman and Kilcoyne (1993). When consumers have a low level of privacy risk and a high level of privacy control, they may not perceive that their privacy is violated and probably feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts about products/services with other consumers. Otherwise, they may perceive that their privacy can be violated and feel reluctant to share their thoughts of products/services on social commerce platforms. Therefore, our study examines consumers' privacy risk and privacy control in social commerce, which deal with the knowledge factor and the control factor, respectively. In the next section, we draw upon TCT to clarify the process of brand value co-creation and integrate privacy into this process.

### **Trust-Commitment Theory**

As discussed above, consumers interact with others as well as with companies during brand value co-creation. Therefore, close relationships between consumers and firms facilitate brand value co-creation. Without such close relationships, consumers may not find it relevant to make the effort to actively participate in social commerce platforms. To understand how consumers develop long-term relationships with firms and engage in brand value co-creation in social commerce, we draw upon TCT (Figure 1). Proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994), TCT argues that trust and relationship commitment play key roles in the process of relationship development and its outcomes. When both trust and relationship commitment are supported, productive outcomes can be produced. In social commerce, we argue that when consumers develop trust toward social commerce platforms and a high level of relationship commitment, they form close relationships with brands. Such close relationships can result in important outcomes such as brand value co-creation. Further, as we will elaborate below, TCT is fully compatible with consumers' social interactions and privacy concerns. Therefore, TCT is useful to understand how to support brand value co-creation in social commerce.



TCT proposes that trust and relationship commitment can result in important relationship outcomes (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). As shown in Figure 1, there are many components that are warranted to investigate. Our study focuses on cooperation and operationalizes it as brand value co-creation. Cooperation refers to collaboration on complementary activities to achieve mutual goals (J. C. Anderson & Narus, 1990). In other words, during cooperation, both parties work together to achieve their common objectives. In social commerce, creating brand value is a mutual goal for firms and consumers. For firms, creating brand value can enhance their competitive advantage. Therefore, firms strive to provide good social commerce environments to support brand value co-creation. For consumers, adding more value to brands can allow them to experience better products/services. Therefore, consumers proactively engage in brand value co-creation by interacting with firms and other consumers. Brand value co-

creation is thus one of the mutual goals between firms and consumers and is selected as the operationalization of cooperation in this study. In the other words, since our study focuses on brand value co-creation, cooperation is selected from TCT because its concept is consistent with brand value co-creation. Other outcomes, while important, are not the foci of this study.

TCT further argues that trust and commitment are supported by different antecedents (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Because one study “cannot study everything at once,” researchers need to select the variables that are most relevant to specific contexts (Joseph Edward McGrath, 1984, p. 12). In other words, our goal is to include the most pertinent variables in the context of social commerce (Joseph E McGrath & Hollingshead, 1994). As discussed above, social commerce results in important privacy and ethical issues, and consumers may feel concerned about opportunistic behaviors such as information misuse on social commerce platforms. Therefore, our study uses privacy risk and privacy control to examine consumers’ perceptions toward opportunistic behavior and examine how privacy risk and privacy control can influence trust.

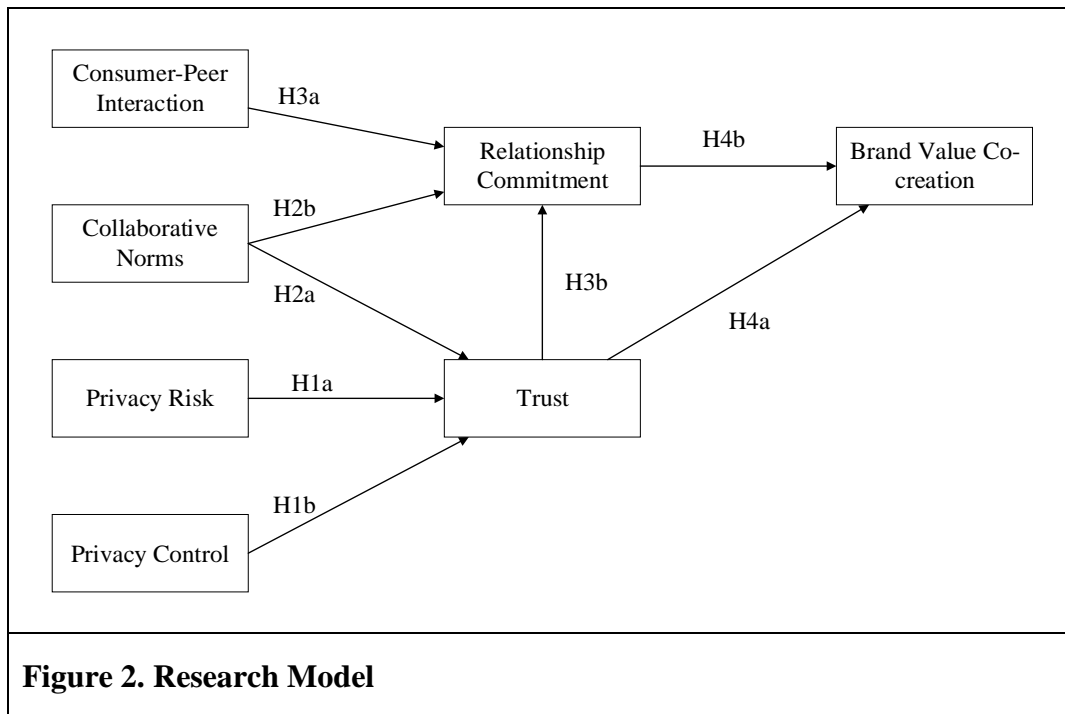
Further, social interactions among consumers is the locus of brand value co-creation in social commerce (Liang et al., 2011; C. Wang & Zhang, 2012) . Therefore, our study uses consumer-peer interaction to operationalize relationship benefits and examine how consumer-peer interaction can influence relationship commitment. Last, shared value refers to “the extent to which partners have beliefs in common about what behaviors, goals, and policies are important or unimportant, appropriate or

inappropriate, and right or wrong” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 25). Again, in considering the importance of social interaction in social commerce, we operationalize shared value with collaborative norms, defined as consumers’ consensus that information sharing is expected and encouraged on social commerce platforms, and assess the effect of collaborative norms on trust / relationship commitment.

### **Research Model and Hypotheses Development**

Our research model is shown in Figure 2. Based on TCT, we argue that antecedents such as privacy risk, privacy control, collaborative norms, and consumer-peer interaction influence consumers’ trust and relationship commitment toward social commerce platforms, which in turn support their brand value co-creation. By emphasizing the central role of relationship commitment and trust in the process of brand value co-creation as well as examining their antecedents, our model contributes to the literature by clarifying how to support consumers’ brand value co-creation in social commerce. Further, by assessing the effect of privacy risk and privacy control on trust, our model contributes to the literature by providing valuable insights regarding the role of privacy in the process of brand value co-creation. Below, we describe our variables and hypotheses in more detail.





### Privacy and Trust

Trust is defined as “the willingness of a party (trustor) to be vulnerable to the actions of another party (trustee) based on the expectation that the other (trustee) will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party (trustee)” (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). On social commerce platforms, consumers are trustors and firms are trustees. Once consumers post information (e.g., shopping experiences) on these platforms, such information can be misused by firms, and thus raising privacy risk. For example, personal information may be made available to other firms without consumers’ permission. For another example, firm personnel may sell the information for personal gains. Such disutility can result in consumers’ privacy concern because people desire to avoid unwanted disclosure (Hui, Teo, & Lee, 2007). Solove (2007) also argue that poor organizational information practices can result in privacy problems and lead to consumers’ concerns for privacy risk. Because consumers have limited ability to

monitor how firms use their posted information, privacy risk can therefore impede consumers' trust in firms.

In additional, some prior studies have proposed privacy risk and privacy control as two important factors to evaluate when individuals form their trust in an object (Dinev & Hart, 2006; Krasnova, Spiekermann, Koroleva, & Hildebrand, 2010). Our study uses privacy risk to indicate consumers' expected loss resulting from posting information on social commerce platforms (Liu & Wang, 2018). The negative impacts of privacy risk on consumer trust can be supported by some prior studies. For example, Dinev and Hart (2006) demonstrate that higher risk perception can decrease trust. As explained by Hong and Cha (2013), risks resulting from environmental uncertainties can make online environment untrustworthy to consumers. Specifically, environmental uncertainties surrounding the online environment can result in privacy risk (Pavlou, 2003). In the context of social commerce, consumers need to take a certain level of privacy risk such that they can trust firms and engage in brand value co-creation activities. Specifically, when posting products/services information (e.g., shopping experiences) on social commerce platforms, consumers evaluate the contextual risk (e.g., posted information misuse) and the severity of such risks. When perceiving a higher level of privacy risk due to environmental uncertainties associated with social commerce platforms, consumers think that their posted information may be misused by firms. In such a context, they probably believe that social commerce platforms may not act in their interests and that they are more vulnerable (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002). Therefore, consumers may find it difficult to trust these firms (i.e., less willing to be

vulnerable). Once the level of privacy risk exceeds a certain, consumers probably do not trust these firms any more (Gefen, 2000). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*H1a: Privacy risk is negatively related to trust.*

Our study uses privacy control to reflect consumers' perception of their abilities to control their posted information (Liu & Wang, 2018; Malhotra, Kim, & Agarwal, 2004). Previous studies have shown that privacy control can enhance individuals' trust beliefs (e.g., Dinev & Hart, 2003). As indicated by preceding discussions, consumers may feel uncertain about how firms use their posted information on social commerce platforms. As such, a high level of privacy control can alleviate consumers' such concerns and make consumers feel that firms can be trusted (Krasnova et al., 2010). In other words, with a high level of privacy control, environmental uncertainties associated with social commerce platforms can be reduced, and thus consumers are likely to develop their trust in firms.

Further, a higher level of perceived control of information can lead to a more positive psychological perception of contributing information online (Hajli & Lin, 2016). Consumers can thus develop a more trusting attitude toward an online platform and its members when they feel they can control over the information (Krasnova et al., 2010). Similarly, on social commerce platforms, privacy control can help facilitate a comfortable environment that creates confidence in cooperative behavior among the consumers (Das & Teng, 1998). When consumers perceive that they can control their posted information on social commerce platforms, they tend to believe that the posted information is less likely to be misused by firms. Thus, consumers probably believe

that firms act in their interest to protect their privacy and they are less likely to feel vulnerable by sharing their personal shopping experiences, gaining trust in firms. In contrast, when consumers are unsure about the protection of privacy, they are less likely to feel confident in cooperative behavior. In this way, privacy control can be viewed as a mechanism for gaining consumer trust in firms, particularly, when firms show the best interest to protect their customers' privacy. Therefore, consumers are likely to have a more trusting attitude when they perceive a higher level of perceived privacy control.

Lastly, trust can be viewed as a function of the amount and type of control individuals have in certain relationships (Heath & Bryant, 2013), privacy control can increase the amount of control that consumers have in their relationships with firms, thus increasing trust. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*H1b: Privacy control is positively related to trust.*

### **Collaborative Norms, Trust, and Relationship Commitment**

Norms show a certain level of consensus in social systems (Coleman, 1990). Because individuals learn that certain behaviors are important in social systems, norms develop to help them function more effectively (Feldman, 1984). In other words, norms represent shared value among individuals in these systems. Our study focuses on collaborative norms, which reflect consumers' consensus that information sharing is important on social commerce platforms. TCT has argued that shared value (i.e., collaborative norms) enhances both trust and relationship commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 25). In social commerce, collaborative norms represent shared value between consumers and firms. For firms, information sharing can create brand value

and help them gain competitive advantage. For consumers, information sharing can improve their shopping decisions and enjoy better products/services after purchasing. According to Kelman (2017), individuals' attitudes and behaviors result from (1) rewards or punishments (i.e., compliance); (2) the desire to be associated with others (i.e., identification); or (3) sharing of similar values as others (i.e., internalization). On social commerce platforms, collaborative norms represent that firms need to collaborate with consumers and encourage information sharing. When consumers share a higher level of collaborative norms with firms, they are more likely to hold common values with firms and perceive that the exchange of product/service information is encouraged. In such a scenario, consumers probably believe that firms will act in their interest because their interests are consistent with firms', and thus gaining trust in social commerce. Therefore, they probably feel comfortable with engaging on social commerce platforms and trust these firms. In other words, consumers are more willing to become vulnerable and trust firms when consumers and firms both follow collaborative norms. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*H2a: Collaborative norms are positively related to trust.*

Relationship commitment is defined as "an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely" (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23). In social commerce, relationship commitment is highly desired so that consumers become more loyal to the brand and contribute to firms' long-term performance (Morgan & Hunt,

1994). However, commitment to long-term relationships with firms take much effort, and shared value can be one such factor to facilitate relationship commitment. When consumers have a high level of collaborative norms, they internalize their values which is consistent with firms' values on social commerce platforms. Following TCT, consumers will probably be more committed to their relationships with firms. In addition, according to social-technical theory (Bostrom & Heinen, 1977), collaborative norms, by facilitating information sharing, can create a friendly social climate (Tajvidi et al., 2018). In such an environment, consumers are more likely to spend much effort developing long-term relationship with firms on social commerce platforms, leading to a higher level of commitment. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H2b: Collaborative norms are positively related to relationship commitment.*

### **Consumer-Peer Interaction, Trust, and Relationship Commitment**

It takes much time and effort for individuals to establish and maintain a long-term relationship with firms. Therefore, according to TCT, consumers would be willing to develop a relationship commitment with firms when they believe they can derive benefits worthy of individual efforts (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Consumer-peer interaction can be the social benefit derived from maintaining long-term relationships with firms (i.e., social commerce platforms) and engaging in brand value co-creation. Consumer-peer interaction represents consumers' perceived strength of social relationships with their peers (Chai, Das, & Rao, 2011). High consumer-peer interaction shows that consumers have close and strong relationships with others in social commerce platforms. Specifically, on social commerce platforms, consumers share

their shopping experiences and interact with others to exchange product/service information. Through those interactions, consumers may develop and maintain close relationships with others, satisfying their need for relatedness (X. Wang & Li, 2016). Individuals have certain needs that must be fulfilled for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being, and need to relatedness is one of such innate psychological nutriments (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Maintaining close relationships with others and satisfying relatedness need are thus vital because it can facilitate consumers to experience an ongoing sense of well-being or "eudaimonia" (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). Therefore, they are more likely to be committed to their relationships with firms on social commerce platforms because they want to derive more social benefits in the future. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H3a: Consumer-peer interaction is positively related to relationship commitment.*

TCT argues that trust is an important antecedent of relationship commitment (Goo & Huang, 2008; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Because long-term commitment involves vulnerability, individuals probably seek only trustworthy partners (Hrebiniak, 1974). Therefore, trust is the cornerstone of long-term commitment (Spekman, 1988, p. 79). Trust can make social commerce platforms more comfortable environments to which consumers are more likely to maintain a long-term commitment with firms. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H3b: Trust is positively related to relationship commitment.*

### **Trust, Relationship Commitment, and Brand Value Co-creation**

Our study focuses on brand value co-creation as the operationalization of

cooperation in TCT. TCT proposes that both trust and relationship commitment enhance cooperation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Brand value co-creation represents the process through which firms and consumers collaborate to create the value of a brand. To support information sharing and brand value co-creation, consumers need to develop a high level of trust in firms on social commerce platforms so that they perceive that the information posted on these platforms will not be misused. Long-term relationships are also essential so that consumers are more committed to relationships and are thus willing to make the effort to engage in brand value co-creation. Studies in the literature have also found that trust and relationship commitment enhance cooperation in the context of outsourcing (Goo & Huang, 2008). Therefore, we hypothesize:

*H4a: Trust is positively related to brand value co-creation.*

*H4b: Relationship commitment is positively related to brand value co-creation.*

## **Research Method**

Our model was tested with survey data collected from consumers in the United States. Below, we describe our data collection procedures, measurements, data analysis, and results.

### **Data Collection and Sample**

Our study selected Facebook brand pages, a popular social commerce platform, as the context. The platform is appropriate because many organizations use it to promote their products and/or services and interact with their customers (Zaglia, 2013). The research population is American consumers who visit Facebook brand page regularly. A survey company maintaining national panels (i.e., sampling frames) was employed



to recruit participants. Systematic sampling was used to recruit participants. During the sampling, survey companies firstly selected these potential qualified individuals (i.e., social media users in this study) and then sent out online survey invitations. For example, assume the size of the national panel was about 100,000 and about 400 participants were planned to be selected. Then invitations of the survey were sent out with the interval of 250 users.

Participants would qualify for the survey only if they 1) followed brand pages on Facebook and visited certain brand pages regularly<sup>3</sup> and 2) used Facebook many times a week. Participants were asked to fill in the survey based on their experiences with their most favorite brand page. The data collection was conducted in the summer of 2017 and took about two weeks.

In total, we received 400 valid responses. 63.57% of participants are female, and the majority of participants have some college education. On average they have 5.87 years of experiences using Facebook and 2.81 years of experiences visiting Facebook brand pages. Participants followed a variety of brands such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Nike, Giorgio Armani, Amazon, and Macy's. The detailed demographic information on participants is shown in Appendix A.

## **Measures**

Our measures were adapted from the previous literature (see Appendix B for complete measurement). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Specifically, the privacy risk and privacy control items

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<sup>3</sup> Only participants who visited firms' brand pages regularly were kept for our analysis.

were adapted from (Xu et al., 2011); the consumer-peer interaction items were adapted from (Chai et al., 2011); the collaborative norms items were adapted from (Bock, Kankanhalli, & Sharma, 2006); the trust items were adapted from (Liang et al., 2011); the relationship commitment items were adapted from (Liang et al., 2011); and the brand value co-creation items were adapted from (Tajvidi et al., 2017).

### **Data Analysis and Results**

Our model was tested with partial least squares (PLS), a component-based structural equation modeling technique. SmartPLS (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005) was used with the bootstrap resampling method (using 1,000 samples) to determine the significance of the paths. PLS was used in our study because our measurements were not normally distributed and because the Shapiro-Wilk tests were significant. According to (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2016), PLS is more appropriate with non-normally distributed data.

### **Common Method Bias**

Because all the variables were collected in one survey, we first assessed the potential threat of common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). First, a Harmon one-factor analysis was conducted. The exploratory factor analysis extracted six factors explaining 79.80% of the variance, and the amount of variance explained by the first factor is 44.83%. We then assessed CMB with a marker-variable technique (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). A marker variable was used as a surrogate for method variance to partial out method bias. After adjustment, all the significant correlations remained significant. Therefore, we concluded that CMB was

probably not a serious concern.

### Measurement Model Assessment

We first evaluated the measurement model. Each item loaded significantly on its respective construct, with none of the loadings below .50 (Hulland, 1999) (Appendix C). The composite reliabilities (CRs) were over .70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) was over .50 (Table 1). Therefore, convergent validity was supported (Gefen & Straub, 2005). Discriminant validity was also confirmed by ensuring that the correlations between constructs were below .85 (Brown, 2014); additionally, for each construct, the square root of its AVE exceeded all correlations between that factor and any other construct (Table 1). Therefore, our measures demonstrated good psychometric properties.

**Table 1. Alpha, CR, AVE, Correlation between Constructs and Square-root of AVEs (on-diagonal)**

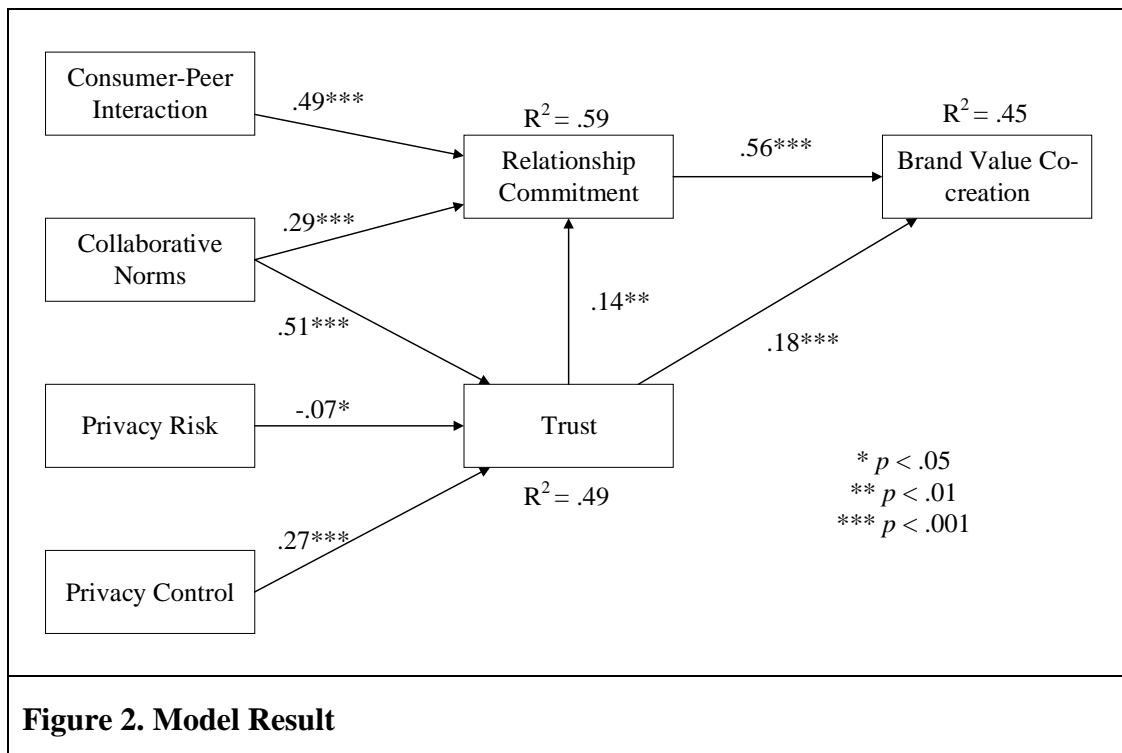
	Alpha	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Collaborative Norms	.94	.95	.72	<b>.85</b>						
2 Consumer–peer Interaction	.96	.97	.90	.50	<b>.95</b>					
3 Relationship Commitment	.96	.97	.90	.63	.69	<b>.95</b>				
4 Privacy Control	.94	.96	.86	.48	.44	.42	<b>.93</b>			
5 Privacy Risk	.95	.97	.88	-.17	.07	-.09	-.08	<b>.94</b>		
6 Brand Value Co-creation	.92	.94	.76	.58	.65	.65	.47	-.02	<b>.87</b>	
7 Trust	.94	.96	.88	.65	.38	.52	.52	-.18	.47	<b>.94</b>

### Model Testing

We then tested our research model (Figure 3). H1a states that privacy risk is

negatively related to trust. This hypothesis is supported ( $\beta = -.07, p < .05$ ). H1b proposes that privacy control is positively related to trust. This hypothesis is supported ( $\beta = .27, p < .001$ ). H2a states that collaborative norms are positively associated with trust. This hypothesis is supported ( $\beta = .51, p < .001$ ). H2b proposes that collaborative norms are positively associated with relationship commitment. This hypothesis is supported ( $\beta = .29, p < .001$ ). H3a proposes that consumer-peer interaction enhances relationship commitment. This hypothesis is supported ( $\beta = .49, p < .001$ ). H3b states that trust is positively associated with relationship commitment. This hypothesis is supported ( $\beta = .14, p < .01$ ). Last, both trust ( $\beta = .18, p < .001$ ) and commitment ( $\beta = .56, p < .001$ ) support brand value co-creation, supporting H4a and H4b.

To summarize, all of our hypotheses are supported. Further, about half of the variance from trust, relationship commitment, and brand value co-creation are explained by their antecedents, further providing strong support for our model.



## **Discussion**

Drawing on TCT, this paper presents a model that aims to create an ethical and trustworthy social commerce community for brand value co-creation by examining the impacts of online consumer privacy concerns (namely privacy concerns and privacy controls) and social interaction (namely consumer-peer interaction and collaborative norms) on consumers' psychological reactions. Based upon survey data collected from 400 American consumers, our research results support the notion that privacy risk, privacy control, and collaborative norms significantly influence consumers' trust, and that consumer-peer interaction and collaborative norms are positively related to relationship commitment. Further, both relationship commitment and trust enhance consumers' brand value co-creation on Facebook brand pages. Our study offers important theoretical and practical implications, which are discussed in detail below.

### **Implications for Theory**

First, brand value co-creation is an important phenomenon in the social commerce environment and can bring significant benefits to business. Consumers are now playing a very important role in driving value co-creation in today's digital marketing (e.g., Payne, Storbacka, Frow, & Knox, 2009; Xie, Bagozzi, & Troye, 2008). Our work provides an understanding of how to support brand value co-creation from a consumer perspective with a focus on the ethical issues surrounding online consumer privacy concerns. Our study reveals the ethical issues raised by social commerce by examining the contrary aspects of brand value co-creation and shows that both privacy risk and

privacy control have significant effects on trust, which increases consumers' brand value co-creation in the social commerce environment. This is among the first few studies that aims to facilitate a trustworthy social commerce community for consumers' brand value co-creation by researching consumers' reactions to privacy concerns. From a consumer perspective, our study shows that consumers can be relational actors capable of acting in their own interests but in favor of good privacy control and protection. Thus, it contributes to marketing ethics by showing how we can build an ethical digital environment for triggering consumers' brand value co-creation from the individual consumer perspective. Indeed, consumers' perception of privacy risk and privacy control influence consumers' ethical perceptions, which in turn influence their subsequent co-creation behaviors. Overall, these results contribute to the ethicality literature by highlighting the importance of privacy risk and privacy control in building a trustworthy environment for brand value co-creation in social commerce.

Second, our study identifies two key social interaction constructs that drive consumers' brand value co-creation in social commerce: consumer-peer interaction and collaborative norms. Based on TCT, our research results support the notion that consumer-peer interaction is positively related to relationship commitment and that collaborative norms are positively related to relationship commitment and trust. The research findings indicate that social commerce is now changing the way to create a trustworthy relationship market. These results demonstrate the important role of social interaction in trust and relationship commitment. Our study contributes to the literature by showing how social interaction among consumers can develop consumers' trust and

commitment toward social commerce platforms and support their brand value co-creation.

### **Implications for Practice**

Branding co-creation can serve as a business strategy to improve brand management, increase sales, and support business decisions. By taking advantage of our empirical findings, firms can better engage their consumers in social commerce and encourage their participation in the process of value co-creation by building a trustworthy community. Our study shows companies that consumers do feel concerns toward this privacy and do desire a higher level of privacy control. Therefore, ethical companies should be aware of consumers' privacy concerns and should collaborate with social commerce platform providers to increase consumers' control over their posted information and to protect their privacy. For example, firms should develop clear privacy policies regarding what information will be collected from consumers and how the information will be used. Firms should allow consumers to decide whether they are willing to provide the information. They can also provide benefits (e.g., coupons, discounts) to consumers in return for using their information. Platform providers can also allow consumers to specify who can access certain posts. Firms can then announce how consumers' information on social commerce platforms have been used periodically, and explain how the information collected has helped firms to improve products/services. When firms/platform providers plan to collect additional information, they need to consider consumers' possible reactions because they want to maintain a long-term relationship with their consumers. They should never sell/provide consumer

information to third parties without consumers' consent.

Our study further shows that consumer-peer interaction and collaborative norms can enhance consumers' trust and relationship commitment toward social commerce platforms. Therefore, firms should collaborate with platform providers to promote social interactions among consumers to facilitate consumers' brand value co-creation. For example, consumers can be notified when their posts are liked by their contacts to strengthen social relationships among consumers and make social interactions more enjoyable. Platform providers also need to establish collaborative norms and prohibit unfriendly interactions on their platforms.

Regarding consumers, our study shows that privacy risk has a negative effect on trust during brand value co-creation in social commerce platforms. Considering the recent Facebook privacy scandal (M. Anderson, 2018), we suggest that consumers pay more attention to privacy risk while interacting with others on social commerce platforms.

### **Limitations and Opportunities for Future Studies**

Our study has a few limitations. First, our study selected Facebook brand pages as the context. Although Facebook brand pages are quite popular and have been examined in the literature (Zaglia, 2013), our results may not be generalized to other types of social commerce platforms. Second, a survey company was hired to recruit participants. Although our participants came from a variety of backgrounds, our sample may still be biased. Third, we focus on American consumers, who have a medium level of uncertainty avoidance according to (Hofstede, 2001). Future studies can test our model



in high uncertainty avoidance cultures (e.g., Italy) to determine whether privacy risk has a stronger effect.

Future studies can extend our study in several ways. First, other contrary aspects of brand value co-creation (e.g., information overload) can be examined. Second, moderators can be introduced to explore whether the effect of privacy risk changes under certain conditions. Third, other theoretical lenses can be adopted to further understand how to motivate consumers' brand value co-creation. Lastly, it might be interesting for future scholars to elaborate the joint impact of social and privacy on brand value co-creation and/or other consumer outcomes.

We also tested our model with different sub-samples following the formula of Keil et al. (2000), and the results are shown in Appendix D. We find that younger generations<sup>4</sup> feel less concerned toward their privacy in brand value co-creation. Specifically, the effect of privacy risk on trust is not significant for younger generations, and the effect of privacy control on trust for younger generations is less than that for older generations. On the other hand, younger generations care more about trust, given that the empirical evidence that the effect of trust on both relationship commitment and brand value co-creation is stronger for younger generations than for older generations. Further, given that gender differences have been found in all the hypotheses of our study, female and male react differently to brand value co-creation in social commerce. These behavioral differences can be resulted from genders' different roles in online

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<sup>4</sup>Following Hershatter and Epstein (2010), we selected those who were born after 1980 as younger generations (i.e., digital natives). The recent literature has shown that these digital natives may become differently in digital environment (Liu, Wang, & Liu, 2018).

communities (e.g., Eagly & Wood, 2011; Lin, Featherman, Sarker, & Management, 2017). Overall, these results show interesting demographic differences, and future studies are warranted to examine how individuals' demographic characteristics influence the process of brand value co-creation.

### **Conclusion**

As firms increasingly adopt social commerce to promote their products/services, it is important to understand how to support consumers' brand value co-creation. Social commerce has also raised important ethical issues regarding how to use shared information and protect consumers' privacy. A theoretical model is developed based on the trust-commitment perspective and is tested using survey data from American consumers. The results provide strong support for our model. Future studies can extend our study by further examining other contrary factors or by including relevant moderators.

## Appendix A: Sample Demographic Information

Category	Sample (N = 400)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
White	82.40%
Black or African American	9.29%
American Indian or Alaska Native	.73%
Asian	3.67%
Hispanic	3.42%
Other	.49%
<b>Education</b>	
Less than high school	1.22%
High school graduate	20.05%
Some college	27.38%
2 year degree	12.96%
4 year degree	30.07%
Professional degree	7.82%
Doctorate	.49%
<b>Age</b>	
18-19	.24%
20 - 29	10.27%
30 - 39	15.40%

40 - 49	18.83%
50 - 59	24.94%
60 or older	30.32%
Gender (% of Female)	63.57%
Years visiting Facebook	5.87 (SD 2.89)
Years visiting Facebook Brand Page	2.81 (SD 2.20)

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## **Appendix B: Measurement**

### **Privacy Risk**

- PR1     It would be risky to post information.
- PR2     There would be high potential for privacy loss associated with posting information.
- PR3     My information would be inappropriately used by other peers.
- PR4     Posting information would involve many unexpected problems.

### **Privacy Control**

- PC1     I believe I can control the information posted.
- PC2     I believe I have control over who can get access to my information posted.
- PC3     I think I have control over what information is released.
- PC4     I believe I have control over how my information is used by other peers.

### **Consumer–peer Interaction**

- CPI1    I maintain close social relationships with other users.
- CPI2    I spend a lot of time interacting with other users.
- CPI3    I know other users on a personal level.
- CPI4    I have frequent communication with other users.

### **Collaborative Norms**

- CN1     There is a norm of cooperation.
- CN2     There is a norm of collaboration.
- CN3     There is a norm of teamwork.
- CN4     There is a willingness to value and respond to diversity.
- CN5     There is a norm of openness to conflicting views.

CN6 There is a norm of tolerance of mistakes.

CN7 Information sharing is important.

CN8 Information sharing is strongly encouraged.

### **Trust**

TIF1 The performance of Facebook Brand Page always meets my expectations.

TIF2 Facebook brand page can be counted as good features.

TIF3 Facebook brand page is reliable.

### **Relationship Commitment**

RC1 I have an emotional attachment to my favorite Facebook brand page.

RC2 I feel a sense of belonging to my favorite Facebook brand page.

RC3 I feel a strong connection to my favorite Facebook brand page.

RC4 I feel a part of the group in my favorite Facebook brand page.

### **Brand Value Co-creation**

BVC1 I often share corporate posts (such as products or news) from my favorite  
Facebook brand page on my own Facebook page.

BVC2 I often recommend my favorite Facebook brand page to my Facebook contacts.

BVC3 I frequently upload product-related videos, audios, pictures, or images from my  
favorite Facebook brand page on my own Facebook page.

BVC4 I often join events organized through my favorite Facebook brand page.

BVC5 I often share my own shopping experiences on my favorite Facebook brand page.

### Appendix C: Item descriptive statistics

Construct	Item	Mean	SD	Loading
Privacy Risk	PR1	3.74	1.62	.93
	PR2	3.91	1.68	.95
	PR3	3.70	1.59	.92
	PR4	3.65	1.69	.95
Privacy Control	PC1	4.55	1.67	.90
	PC2	4.59	1.60	.93
	PC3	4.52	1.57	.95
	PC4	4.40	1.66	.93
Consumer–peer Interaction	CPI1	4.24	1.83	.95
	CPI2	4.00	1.82	.94
	CPI3	4.06	1.98	.93
	CPI4	4.14	1.90	.97
Collaborative Norms	CN1	5.19	1.17	.88
	CN2	5.13	1.19	.90
	CN3	5.01	1.33	.87
	CN4	5.20	1.22	.89
	CN5	4.92	1.28	.80
	CN6	4.83	1.27	.77
	CN7	5.36	1.27	.86
	CN8	5.44	1.22	.82

Trust	TIF1	5.08	1.25	.94
	TIF2	5.20	1.19	.95
	TIF3	5.16	1.21	.94
Relationship	RC1	4.04	1.84	.93
Commitment	RC2	4.42	1.72	.97
	RC3	4.34	1.72	.97
	RC4	4.55	1.67	.93
Brand Value	BVC1	3.99	1.90	.88
Co-creation	BVC2	3.99	1.88	.91
	BVC3	3.52	1.94	.84
	BVC4	3.41	1.88	.85
	BVC5	3.85	1.96	.89



#### Appendix D. Demographic differences of model testing

	Male (144)	Female (256)	Diff. Sig.?	Young (181)	Old (219)	Diff. Sig.?
H1a: Privacy risk→trust	-.03	-.12*	sd	-.07	-.09*	sd
H1b: Privacy control→trust	.31***	.25***	>***	.22**	.28***	<***
H2a: Collaborative norms→trust	.57***	.46***	>***	.59***	.45***	>***
H2b: Collaborative norms → relationship commitment	.36***	.28***	>***	.26***	.33***	<***
H3a: Consumer-Peer Interaction →relationship commitment	.46***	.49***	<***	.53***	.47***	>***
H3b: Trust → relationship commitment	.06	.17**	sd	.14*	.11*	>***
H4a: Trust → brand value co- creation	.26***	.13*	>***	.18*	.14*	>***
H4b: Relationship commitment → brand value co-creation	.58***	.54***	>***	.55***	.55***	ns

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; ns = no significant difference; sd = structurally different (one path is significant and the other is not); Diff. Sig. = Different Significantly?

**Compliance with Ethical Standards:**

**Ethical approval:** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Informed consent:** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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